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- President Joe Biden

OPCW Fails to Agree on Budget, Russian Request for Extension

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By Kerry Boyd

Meeting September 10-13, the executive council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the international body responsible for overseeing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), was unable to agree on a budget for 2003 or on Russian requests to extend deadlines for chemical weapons destruction.

The council is responsible for recommending a budget to the Conference of the States-Parties, which will meet October 7-11. The council is scheduled to meet again October 3 and might decide on a budget then.

OPCW Director-General Rogelio Pfirter said in his first presentation to the council that the organization's financial situation, which has suffered recently, has improved somewhat, thanks in part to voluntary contributions from several countries. Pfirter replaced former Director-General José Bustani after the United States led the campaign to oust him in April.

However, Pfirter asked the council to approve an increase in the organization's budget to allow for inflation. Pfirter emphasized that the proposed increase would provide only a bare-bones budget for the organization, leaving several posts vacant and postponing equipment purchases.

Speaking before the council and again a week later in Washington, Pfirter called for more financial support for the organization, particularly as Russia plans to begin operations at the Gorny chemical weapons destruction facility in December and as the United States plans to begin destroying chemical weapons at three more facilities before 2004. Between 2003 and 2005, Pfirter said he expects the number of facilities dismantling chemical weapons to double from six to 12, significantly increasing the workload of the OPCW, which is responsible for inspecting the facilities.

The council also did not decide on Russian requests to extend deadlines for destroying its chemical weapons stockpile. States-parties had agreed in the CWC to destroy their entire Category 1 stockpiles—the most dangerous chemicals—by April 29, 2007, but Russia has said that it will miss that deadline and earlier incremental deadlines.

The council made progress in other areas, however, including finalizing facility agreements to carry out inspections at U.S. chemical weapons destruction facilities in Tooele, Utah, and Anniston, Alabama. The Tooele site is currently the only U.S. facility destroying such weapons, and the Anniston site is expected to begin operations this fall.

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1100 H Street NW, #520
Washington, DC 20005
Tel: [\(202\) 463-8270](tel:(202)463-8270)

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